

**Fairfield Hills Community Input Council:  
Draft Outcomes**

**Points of agreement and points of divergence**

- 1) We need to take a new, fresh look at the Master Plan, given that we are now in a different context and a different time, in part due to the economic crisis.
- 2) We want to encourage the town to take down the buildings that need dismantling as soon as possible, since the cost of doing so is likely to go up significantly the more we wait. Taking more buildings down can make the site more attractive to developers, should we choose to go that route. It can also serve as a sign of progress and provide a ray of hope that things are starting to happen. This could help counter the “Fairfield Hills fatigue” that has been setting in.
- 3) At the same time, we acknowledge that seeing the old buildings come down will also be a sad day for many people. We may need to mourn our losses, including the 10+ years of neglect of the buildings that has contributed to the need to bring them down.
- 4) We do not want to get bogged down in the past. At the same time, we feel that it is important to make the history clear, including an accounting of moneys spent thus far, in order to help us all move forward.
- 5) We also want to learn useful lessons from the past. This includes acknowledging that at times there has not been enough due diligence. Also, that many negative surprises were encountered in the remediation and demolition processes that have occurred to date.
- 6) As a council, we agreed on the main priorities for the future of Fairfield Hills, of having a “core” that serves as a cultural destination and/or a sports recreational destination, with other additional uses as well. We greatly appreciate the work that the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee has done thus far, and we want to encourage them to look at the Master Plan, with these two principal areas in mind.
- 7) One area of divergence is the SCALE of the “destination” Fairfield Hills should be. While we agree on culture and recreation as the two main themes, some of us would like for these to be primarily municipal destinations (a community cultural center and an indoor recreational facility) with residents of other areas welcome as well. In contrast, others of us favor a larger, regional-scale theatre or sports arena at Fairfield Hills, which would generate even greater revenue for the town as a whole. Please see the various scenarios that were generated, for greater detail on the various options that we envisioned.
- 8) We agree that we do NOT want certain kinds of large-scale commercial development at Fairfield Hills: no box stores, industrial, or manufacturing uses. We also welcome the possibility of small-scale niche businesses that fit in with the larger vision; for example, restaurants to serve the clientele of a community cultural center or a community sports center; a horse boarding stable; leasing agricultural land to a Community-Supported Agriculture venture; a “farm team” for the baseball field; and other such small-scale commercial ventures that would fit in with the larger vision of Fairfield Hills as a community center.

9) We did not reach any agreements as to whether there should be housing at Fairfield Hills, and if so, what kind of housing. However, we did all agree that the town needs to engage in a town-wide evaluation of housing needs and housing development opportunities, as well as a town-wide evaluation of commercial needs and commercial development opportunities, so that we are not looking at Fairfield Hills in isolation from the rest of the town, but instead engage in a more holistic and comprehensive approach.

10) While we agree on the need to take down the buildings, we do not necessarily agree on strategies for doing so. We identified at least five potential strategies, as well as some benefits and burdens of each:

a) Have the town finance all of the necessary demolition. Concerns include that this could be a hard sell to voters for economic reasons, given its effect on the debt load to the town, and the fact that there are other areas that we need to be investing in as well.

b) Continue to seek developers who will fund part of the demolition. Concerns include that we would still be paying for this, as we would need to offer a developer a reduced price; also, a development project could have hidden costs in terms of increased town services. There was also a concern that if a developer is not found, we will have to do it ourselves anyway, at a higher future cost.

c) Selling a small portion of the land outright, in order to fund the demolition and the community vision for the larger remaining portion. Challenges include that this could severely limit any control over the portion of land that is sold, although it would still be subject to zoning regulations.

d) Re-allocating funds that are currently earmarked for other projects. Challenges include the political difficulties of striking a balance between different needs.

e) Explore innovative options, such as public-private partnerships and obtaining grant funds. Challenges include that even with public-private partnerships, or public-non-profit partnerships, the town could still end up paying a considerable sum for the demolition.

11) We did not reach agreement on whether outside developers should be brought in or not. On one side of the coin, concerns were expressed about the town having the needed expertise to manage a project of this size. On the other side of the coin, concerns were expressed about all the “hidden costs” that are often involved when a developer is brought in. It was also pointed out that expertise is needed to work effectively with developers, in order to prevent waste and “give-aways”. We agreed that in the best of all worlds, the benefits to the developer would coincide with the benefits to the town.

12) Even if we are not able to create what we want at Fairfield Hills right away, having a clear focal point can be of value. It can help us be on the lookout for opportunities that appear, to draw them in to a coherent vision. For example, if someone is looking to build an indoor sports center in town, we could encourage them to do so at Fairfield Hills. Having a strong, compelling vision could help the town come together and make progress on the improvement of the property.

## **Various scenarios generated by the participants in the Community Input Council:**

### Scenario #1

- 1) Sports Arena, similar to Harbor Yard at Bridgeport, as central feature.  
Multi-use facility where concerts can also be held.
- 2) Cinema complex, similar to the Loews Theatre at Danbury, though perhaps with fewer screens.
- 3) These two key projects would serve as “anchors” or a “core magnet” get things moving.
- 4) Around that “core”, the other uses would also be included: community sports and community arts, agricultural open space, social services, additional municipal services.

### Scenario #2

- 1) 60 acres land-banked for future educational needs
- 2) Municipal Arts Center as “destination” for town
- 3) EMS facility
- 4) Multi-purpose field with parking
- 5) Adding to Youth Academy if necessary
- 6) Remaining land left open for park-like pursuits (Open Space).
- 7) Very small-scale commercial in alignment with community uses  
(CSA, horse boarding, etc.)

### Scenario #3 (similar to #2, but w/o land-banking)

- 1) Municipal Arts Center, with playhouse space, art and dance classes.
  - a) community focus w/some regional draw, similar to NYA.
  - b) built either by renovating Plymouth Hall, or building anew, depending on cost.
- 2) Recreational Complex on Wasserman Way  
w/ climbing wall, squash courts, indoor pool, etc.
- 3) Agricultural component developed into both community gardens (with plots available for individual community members), and public gardens for aesthetic enjoyment.
- 4) Small-scale commercial where it is a logical fit: i.e. coffee shops near art center, etc.
- 5) Taking down all of the buildings (except those slated for renovation) as soon as possible.
- 6) In this scenario, the reasons for not including land banking include a) concern about available space and b) keeping emphasis on arts/sport recreation theme.

### Scenario #4 (similar to #3, but with addition of a banquet hall)

- 1) Municipal Arts Center
- 2) Recreational Complex
- 3) Banquet Hall, similar to Fireside, that community can rent for weddings, parties, etc.
  - a) Could be done as private venture, as municipal venture, or as partnership.

### Scenario #5

- 1) Combo Multi-Purpose Arts Center/Theatre, in partnership with commercial backer.
- 2) Sports Complex, with small shops next to it (such as ice cream store.)
- 3) Small shops in Duplexes, including boutiques, Ye Olde Confectionery shop, etc.